

Nadler to Administration: How About Securing Nuclear Materials We CAN Find?

Wednesday, 25 June 2003

WASHINGTON, DC -- Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) and 17 of his colleagues today released a letter they sent to President George W. Bush asking plans, if any, had been made by the Administration, prior to the start of the war in Iraq, to secure suspected or confirmed Iraqi nuclear sites. According to a number of sources, several such facilities were looted of low grade nuclear materials that could be used to make so-called "dirty bombs." Upon the release of the letter, Rep. Nadler stated, "The fact that these sites were looted has very troubling implications for our Homeland Security program. How is it possible that we were able to properly secure oil-related sites, but failed miserably with sites that contained materials that are easily converted into potential weapons."

Rep. Nadler's letter, dated June 16, 2003, was signed also signed by Ellen Tauscher, Tammy Baldwin, Jim McDermott, Barbara Lee, Lloyd Doggett, Gary Ackerman, Raul M. Grijalva, Carolyn Maloney, Anthony Weiner, Lynn Woolsey, Maxine Waters, Bernard Sanders, Edward Markey, Maurice Hinchey, Janice D. Schakowsky, Betty McCollum, and Jim McGovern.

The text of the letter is as follows:

June 16, 2003

Honorable George W. Bush

President

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to request all relevant information as to what plans your administration made, prior to the actual invasion of Iraq, to secure sites within Iraq that were known or suspected to contain nuclear materials. It has been widely reported that, because of the failure to secure Iraqi nuclear facilities, several such facilities were looted of low-grade nuclear materials that could be used to make a "dirty bomb." This is deeply troubling.

The administration took proper steps to secure and maintain Iraqi oil fields. Through pre-war contracts with various oil companies, Iraqi oil fields were protected for the future economic stability and growth of the country. On several occasions, your administration publicly admonished the Iraqi military not to "burn or destroy oil wells." While we agree that these actions were essential and proper, we do not understand why similar precautions were not taken with respect to nuclear facilities.

The Associated Press reported on May 21, 2003 that "looters have stolen or removed low-enriched uranium and other radioactive sources stored under seal.." at the Tuwaitha nuclear storage facilities. On May 4, 2003, the Washington Post reported that, "a Pentagon team sent to examine a radioactive waste dump in Iraq found it so heavily looted they could not tell whether dangerous materials had been taken." If these reports are accurate, terrorist groups may have obtained materials to make "dirty bombs."

In addition, scores of Iraqi civilians entered nuclear facilities and took barrels to use for storing water. This has led to reports of serious health consequences not only among individuals who entered the facilities, but among people who merely live near them.

It has also come to our attention that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been granted access only to the Tuwaitha area nuclear storage facilities, although less than half of Iraq's nuclear materials were located there. IAEA was not even granted permission to enter the main facility at Tuwaitha. The IAEA team may include the only individuals who have first-hand knowledge of what materials were located at each nuclear facility, and who could verify if low-grade nuclear materials had been removed. We would appreciate knowing why the IAEA team has been limited to no more than ten people, none of whom could be weapons inspectors, and why their scope of work has been so limited by your administration?

While we understand that securing an entire country is a daunting and imperfect task, it would seem that little or no preparation was made to secure nuclear materials and facilities in Iraq. If preparations were made, please explain why the allied forces seem to have failed to secure these critically important sites. We would appreciate a detailed response to this inquiry as the safety and security of the American people are at stake.

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